Coordinates: 42°50′35″N 71°12′25″W

America's Stonehenge

America's Stonehenge is an archaeological site consisting of a number of large rocks and stone structures scattered around roughly 30 acres (120,000 m^2) within the town of Salem, New Hampshire in the United States. It is open to the public for a fee as part of a recreational area which includes snowshoe trails and an alpaca farm. It is a tourist attraction with particular appeal to believers in New Age systems.

Some of the rocks at America's Stonehenge

A number of hypotheses exist as to the origin and purpose of the structures. One viewpoint is a mixture of land-use practices of local farmers in the 18th and 19th centuries and construction of structures by owner William Goodwin in the 1930s.[1] Some claim that the site has a pre-Columbian European origin, but this is regarded as pseudoarchaeological or the result of an early-20th century hoax.[2] Archaeologist David Starbuck has said that "it is widely believed that Goodwin may have 'created' much of what is visible at the site today".[3]:106

MYSTERY HILL
Four miles east on Route III is a privately owned complex of strange stone structures bearing similarities to early stone work found in western Europe. They suggest an ancient culture may have existed here more than 2,000 years ago. Sometimes called "America's Stonehenge," these intriguing chambers hold a fascinating story and could be remnants of a pre-Viking or even Phoenician civilization.

Marker established by the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources.

The site was first dubbed **Mystery Hill**[4][5] by William Goodwin, an insurance executive who purchased the area in 1937.[6] This was the official name of the site until 1982, when it was renamed "America's Stonehenge", a term coined in a news article in the early 1960s. The rebranding was an effort to separate it from roadside oddity sites and to reinforce the idea that it is an ancient archaeological site. The area is named after Stonehenge in England, although there is no cultural or historical connection between the two.

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Origin

The site first appears in print in the 1907 *History of Salem, N.H.*:

> Jonathan Pattee's Cave. He had a house in these woods 70 years ago; took town paupers before the town farm was bought. This is a wild but beautiful spot, among rough boulders and soft pines, about which the most weird and fantastic tale might be woven. There are several caves still intact, which the owner used for storage purposes.[7]

Many believe that Pattee built the site in the nineteenth century, and no unequivocal pre-Columbian European artifacts have been found there.[8]

The site's history is muddled partly because of the activities of William Goodwin, who became convinced that the location was proof that Irish monks (the Culdees) had lived there long before the time of Christopher Columbus, and he sought to publicize the concept. The site has been altered by stone quarrying, and also by Goodwin and others who wanted to move the stones to what they considered to be their original locations; Goodwin might have been responsible for much of what can now be seen.[3]:106–107 Many of the stones have drill marks from the quarrying that took place on the site.[3]:108

More fanciful origins have also been proposed, but artifacts found on the site led archaeologists to the conclusion that the stones were actually assembled for a variety of reasons by local farmers in the 18th and 19th centuries. For example, there is a so-called "sacrificial stone" which contains grooves that some say channeled blood, but it closely resembles "lye-leaching stones" found on many old farms that were used to extract lye from wood ashes, the first step in the manufacture of soap.[9]

In 1982, David Stewart-Smith, director of restoration at Mystery Hill, conducted an excavation of a megalith found in a stone quarry to the north of the main site. His research team excavated the quarry site under the supervision of the New Hampshire state archaeologist and discovered hundreds of chips and flakes from the stone. They concluded that this was evidence of tool manufacture, consistent with American Indian lithic techniques, although no date could be ascertained.[10] Archaeologist Clive Runnels stated, "No Bronze Age artifacts have been found there, in fact, no one has found a single artifact of European origin from that period anywhere in the New World."[2]

In popular culture

American horror writer H. P. Lovecraft was an enthusiast for New England megalith sites, and he visited Mystery Hill sometime between 1928 and the 1930s. The site is popularly attributed as inspiration for his story "The Dunwich Horror".[11] Scholars, however, place Lovecraft's visit too late to have inspired the 1929 story.[12]

The site was featured on an episode of the American History Channel TV series *Secrets of the Ancient World* which aired on January 14, 2002, in which Boston University archaeology professor Curtis Runnels refuted the theory that it was built by Celts in ancient history.[2]

The site was also featured on the "Strange Visitors" episode of the *In Search of...* TV series which focused on investigating mysterious phenomena. The episode aired on April 24, 1977 as the second episode in the first season of the show.

See also

- Stonehenge replicas and derivatives

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Notes

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